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## MY CONTEMPORARIES.

### SOUVENIRS OF SOME CELEBRATED PEOPLE OF THE TIMES.

BY JULES CLARETIE.

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I THINK there is nothing sweeter in the world, after the joy of living with those whom one loves, than the remembrance of those whom one has loved. Age which brings many disillusionings also has its consolations. It allows one to claim from the past whatever, either affecting or remarkable, it may contain.

In looking backward at those one has known in former times one lives one's life over again, but without the trouble of it, finding even in the disappointments of the past a certain melancholy not entirely without charm, just as after one has recovered from sickness one finds in convalescence something indescribably delightful. I do not in any sense mean to say by this that life is a morbid thing, for which the remedy would be repose. No, nothing so avails as the human struggle to strengthen the moral and mental forces; but after the contest, what is more charming than to recall it?

It has been my lot to know celebrated people—nearly all those who have made our times illustrious. I have either seen them in their glorious and sometimes sovereign old age, like Victor Hugo, or at their *débuts*, obscure and poor, but dreaming of glory and fortune, like Émile Zola. I have associated with Michelet, whose ardent words made me enthusiastic at twenty. I have, though very young then, been treated as a friend by Sainte-Beuve. I still hear the voice of Alexandre Dumas the elder, recounting to me in his boasting tones his remembrances of Naples and of his collaboration with Garibaldi. Émile Augier, to whom Paris will soon erect a statue, formed one

of the affections of my young life. I recollect Alphonse Daudet at twenty years of age, handsome as a Hindoo god, but sick, so that, as he was starting for Algeria, we said, "The poor fellow, we shall see him no more!" He was then known only as the author of the delicious poem of the *Double Conversion*, and of the romance of the *Chaperon Rouge*. Since then he has become one of the masters of contemporary fiction and of the French language, and, thank God, we have seen him again, and we see him every day.

Our sons are now making their appearance, and Léon Daudet continues his father's glorious name. Recently in visiting the salon of the *Société Nationale des Beaux Arts* in the Champ de Mars, I stopped before two pictures numbered 577 and 578; one represented "*Old Vessels*," the other the armed vessel "*Devastation*." The two marine pictures are signed "G. Hugo," and "G. Hugo" is Georges Hugo, the grandson of the great poet. He had learned to work in crayon before he became a sailor. He was at sea for some years and while on board continued to paint in addition to his other labors. He is now an artist and exhibitor. Well I see it all again—he quite small and I drawing figures, soldiers, and zouaves for him during the siege of Paris, while his father, Charles, and his white-bearded grandfather, Victor Hugo, watched my pen forming figures on the paper. How time passes! Victor Hugo is dead, dead also and (before him) is my friend his son Charles. And the small child of whom the poet then sang in "*L'Art d'être Grand-père*" now handles the brush.

"Go on! Another zouave!" he would say long ago when I stopped. And Victor Hugo smiling would remark: "Obey, I admit but one tyranny; indeed I am not satisfied with admitting it, I proclaim it. It is the tyranny of children."

At that time I had a project for publishing a book—a sort of protest of liberal youth against the Empire—under the title, *Mémoire d'un Homme de Trente Ans*. I wished to bring forth in it all the grievances which with our republican aspirations we had against the Imperial régime. I waited till I was exactly thirty years of age to commence that book. When the time came, we had something else to think of than writing! Did we even know if we would ever write again? It was in December, 1870, and the enemy was at our gates. I put off the *Mémoire d'un Homme*

*de Trente Ans* to the last moment, and then put on a soldier's cloak. To-day as I think of that projected book which will never be published, I give it a different title and form in my mind. Man spends his life in building castles in the future. As I waited in those days to be thirty before writing the first line of the *Mémoire d'un Homme de Trente Ans* (which was never penned) I am waiting to-day for the end of the present century to publish, at the earliest dawn of the twentieth century, a volume of my recollections and impressions, which I shall call *Souvenirs du Siècle dernier*. But, of course, to realize this new dream God must, as we say, lend me life. To all his plans Victor Hugo always added "*Deo volente*." It is perhaps well, therefore, to make haste and not to defer the accomplishment of any work whatever to a date fixed by ourselves, which fate may not always permit us to reach. Do we know, indeed, whether or not we shall finish the page that we have begun?

The Memoir that I wish to preserve of celebrated men I have known—writers, politicians, painters, comedians, soldiers—will help me to compose my *Souvenirs du Siècle dernier*, when the nineteenth century shall have given place to the twentieth. Perhaps at that time the fame of many who are eminent as I write may have suffered damage. Every new generation is severe enough upon those who have preceded it, and our young people, who found a new literary or artistic school every fifteen days, willingly class their elders among the "*Invalides*."

It seems to me that we were less anxious to scalp those who went before us. Admiration for the masters was one of the virtues of our youth. I recall that one night at the first representation of *Le Lac de Glenaston*, a weak French adaptation of one of Dion Boucicault's plays, at the Ambigu, I saw, from the top of the second gallery where I had had difficulty in securing a place, two young men enter. They took seats in the orchestra, the one smiling, lively, restless, fair, and noisy—the other already stout, quiet, and almost shy. They were Edmond About, then in full vogue, and Francisque Sarcey, who was serving, but already with brilliant success, his first campaign as dramatic critic in the *Opinion Nationale*. The sight of those two young masters in journalism put me in such a state that I listened no longer to the play. I believe that I did not miss much. I watched Edmond About; I watched Sarcey.

They were saluted by all. The actresses smiled on them. "Ah!" I thought to myself, "Shall I ever be able to follow their footsteps?"

To-day I am persuaded that not only if poor About, who is dead, but my friend Sarcey, who is strong and in good condition, entered a theatre the young people would not say to themselves, "Would that I might some day be like him!" but rather, "I wish I could wring his neck this very day!" It is progress; Sarcey knows it well, and laughs at it often.

We edited at that time a small literary paper which appeared every week, and which was called *Diogène*. This journal, satirical like all young publications, carried in front a picture of Diogenes, with a lantern in his hand, looking for a man among the great men of Paris. The great men at that time were after Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas or rather the two Dumas, Théophile Gautier, Jules Janin, Sainte-Beuve, Jules Sandeau, Arsène Houssaye, and many others; and among dramatic artists Frédéric Lemaître, Mélingue, Samson, Regnier, Provost, Mme. Plessy, Augustine Brohan (or rather the Brohans, Augustine and Madeleine). Rachel was dead. I had seen the funeral leave the house in which she lived in the Place Royale not far from the residence of Victor Hugo, on a January morning, and I recollect the enormous head of Alexandre Dumas (*père*), like the forehead of a good giant, towering above the crowd that had gathered to take a last farewell of the *tragédienne*.

The day after the funeral, Granier de Cassagnac wrote in his journal, *Le Réveil*, "Tragedy is forever shrouded in the *tragédienne's* coffin." Granier de Cassagnac did not foresee Sarah Bernhardt.

We sought therefore with Diogenes' lantern for great men, and when we found them we gave them the respectful salutation of our twenty years. But we looked above all for *young* men, and I remember having seen one night at M. Paul Meurice's, in the Avenue Frochot, a thin young man, with very fair, nearly golden, hair, and with peculiar dreamy and fixed eyes, who had just published a first volume of verses. There was a little piece of his being performed at the Théâtre de l'Odéon.

"And the title of your piece is?" we asked the young poet.

"Its name is *Le Passant*."

It was François Coppée.

I had been struck by the resemblance of the author, soon to be celebrated, to Victorien Sardou. And I had also seen Sardou, some years before in the humble compiling office of the *Diogène* in the Passage Saulnier, to which he had come to thank us for an article that had treated of one of his first pieces, his first success, *Les Pattes de Mouche*. My first article for *Diogène* had appeared in the same number with a wretched portrait representing Victorien Sardou coming out of an egg—a thin, emaciated Sardou, the profile sharp, his long hair falling in stiff rings close to his hollow cheeks, a Sardou who resembled Bonaparte in Italy much more than Francois Coppée did Victorien Sardou.

I did not know the author of the *Pattes de Mouche* other than from this distorted picture, until one morning I saw a thin young man squeezed into a black surtout, his high well-modelled forehead surmounted by thick black hair, enter the office of our little paper. Bright eyes lit up his face, which was of an extraordinary fineness, but what struck me most about his expression was the smile, slightly ironical, though amiable, which gave his profile the aspect of that of Erasure. At that time (I speak of thirty years ago) M. Sardou had above all the Cæsarean visage of the young Conqueror of Toulon, and he had also taken Toulon, I mean to say that he had gained there his first victory and the most difficult one,—that which opens the gates of the future and decides a whole existence. He was thirty-two years old and, at once, in one night, he had thrown from him, like a too heavy cloak, all the years of that noble misery which he had conquered. I do not know of any young man engaged in the struggle for life in Paris whose career was more dignified and courageous than his had been. It ought to serve as an example to all artists who dream of fame, and who despair because she does not come to them at their first call. Before his reputation was established, or more correctly before achieving his first success, Victorien Sardou had worked strenuously, manfully, to gain before the millions of the future a commanding place. Quite young, having already written a tragedy which he destined for Rachel, *La Reine Ulfra*, and one *Bernard Palissy*, Victorien Sardou thought he had won his place when he produced a comedy in verse at the Odéon entitled *La Taverne des Étudiants*, which was outrageously hissed. It represented some German students who were drinking beer, after the fashion of German stu-

dents, and the students of Paris thought that in presenting these drinking-scenes the author of the new play insulted the college youths. And how they protested ! I do not know whether the piece was finished, but at all events it was brought to an end in the midst of an indescribable tumult. The poor *Taverne des Étudiants* had also very bad luck. In the middle of an important love scene, on which Victorien Sardou had counted much, the gas suddenly went out, and for fully a quarter of an hour the whole theatre was plunged, like Orestes, in profound darkness. The audience availed themselves of this opportunity to make a deafening uproar, while the unfortunate author, broken-hearted at the shipwreck of his hopes, helped behind the scenes.

But Sardou was not one of those who allow themselves to be beaten. "I have never been unsuccessful," he said to me one day, "that the failure has not rebounded and conducted me to greater success." He was cast down by that tempestuous *début*. He said he would lift himself up again. But he had to live and, as Émile de Girardin has said, the great thing in this world is to *endure*. In order to endure, that is to say exist, Victorien Sardou worked at all the honest trades that a poor scholar could find. He wrote historical studies at one sou a line for Firmin Didot's *Biographie Universelle*, every line of which cost him two or three hours of research and labor. He showed me an essay on Erasme written at that period, a marvel of rare learning. The *Biographie* of Didot contained a life of Jérôme Cardan, by him, which showed an amount of erudition which was extraordinary. It was also saturated with the spirit of the sixteenth century, which Meyerbeer's *Huguenots* and Michelet's writings have brought so conspicuously forward, and of which he later on made such a thrilling episode in his fine drama of *Patrie*. In order that he might not fall the next time he should try his work at the theatre, he divided his time between two occupations—his biographical work and his *métier* of dramatic author—and the means which he employed to learn were both simple and very heroic. When he went to the theatre he listened with passionate attention, noted the good points and the faults, and returning to his home he would reconstruct and rewrite his play entirely, labor which others would have found unnecessary, but which enabled him to acquire the touch of a master. He has besides, much later in life, utilized in his work these fragments and exercises of his youth.

All this work, however, served merely to provide a bare living for him, but did nothing in the way of assuring comfort. Being married he wished to give a little luxury to his wife. Then he loved his books. He often found himself in intimate conversation with a young man, a poet, named Edmond Roche, who also dreamed of glory and who, while waiting, filled a very modest position at the Paris Custom House. Roche and Sardou exchanged their dreams and the accounts of their experiences. "Bah !" said Roche, "You will achieve your aim, you are tempered for the struggle, but I will never have the time." Nevertheless glory smiled first on Edmond Roche. Through the glass doors he saw one day coming into the little office which he occupied in the Custom House a man then very little known in Paris, who had come from Germany to seek applause from the Parisians. "Monsieur," said he to Roche, "they tell me that you speak German well and also that you know my works; I need a translator to present them to the French public. Will you collaborate with me in this translation ? I am Richard Wagner." It seemed to Roche as if it was the Messiah in person who entered the Custom House. He translated *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, and the *Flying Dutchman*, and Sardou assisted in perfecting the work. After all, Roche had guessed correctly—he had not time to wait. Consumption carried him off, and Sardou wrote a preface to his posthumous poems.

Victorien Sardou himself was losing patience, and at the time that M. Montiguy, the director of the Gymnase, accepted his *Pattes de Mouche*, the future author of such famous works was pondering as to whether he should leave France for the New World. He had even made inquiries as to the next boat leaving for America, as he wished to seek his fortune in New York, when M. Montiguy wrote to him, "Come ; your play is accepted."

"Also," Sardou told me, "I am a little superstitious and I have always had confidence in my star. For instance, one day when I was profoundly melancholy I stopped by a post at the side of a door, which I can still see, to allow a large wagon filled with enormous building stones to pass down a street to my right. Suddenly, without any reason, I left the place where I was and moved a short distance away. Scarcely had I quitted the post where I had been a few seconds previously when one of the large stones slipped from the wagon and crushed—yes, literally crushed



—a poor devil of a water-carrier who had stepped into the place which I had just quitted, and which I always look at in passing along that street ; and I said to myself as I watched them carry the corpse to a drug store : ‘ It is you who ought to have died if fate had so willed. Fate protects you. It’s a good sign —Forward ; and courage ! ’ ”

This incident which I have told, among the many that I know of Sardou, has always struck me most forcibly. When he came to see us at the office of *Diogène* he had already emerged triumphantly from that period of dark sorrow. He had encountered on his way a good fairy in the person of the *comédienne* Virginie Déjazet, who played *Les Premières Armes de Figaro* for him, a smart and juvenile piece which revived the spirit of Beaumarchais. He was soon going to bring out *Nos Intimes*, a brilliant success at the Vaudeville Theatre then situated in the Place de la Bourse, (where afterwards I saw Charles Dickens on the night of the first representation of *L’Abbé*) and Victorien Sardou glowed under the first kisses of glory.

He fascinated me from our first interview, and he asked me to visit him in the Place de la Bourse. He gave me tickets for his next play, *Nos Intimes*; and as he had guessed me to be a bibliophile, he showed me his old books, of which some were precious, and which he had picked up at the stands on the quays for two and five sous.

I remember that first visit. Victorien Sardou lived in the corner of the Place and the Rue Notre Dame des Victoires, in a small apartment under the slated roof. In fact, it resembled a little the garret of Bonaparte, lieutenant of artillery, on the quays. Sardou worked there at a table or on a shelf ; everywhere one saw books, books stitched, books in old bindings, manuscripts and heaps of papers. When he was writing, his head was always covered with a velvet cap, and on that day he was dressed in a red flannel coat like the shirts worn by the followers of Garibaldi. It was from that visit that our thirty years’ friendship dated, a sentiment whose strength and depth I have experienced more especially in certain hours of trial.

Who would have said that I should one day take part, in the first theatre in France, in one of this young debutant’s plays ? Nothing could have led me to think that I would be the Director of the *Comédie Française* and I little dreamed of it. I

have seen Sardou at home in the Château de Marly, which he had filled with princely rarities; I have seen him chatting in the woods, walking briskly; and we have searched for the traces of the fugitive André Chenier in the environs of his dwelling. I have seen him happy amidst his own, between his charming wife and his children, who are his life. I have seen him on the stage directing the rehearsal of his work, instilling the sacred fire into the actors, the musicians, the supernumeraries—every one. For me he has remained the ideal of life, a man better equipped for the literary battle than any I have encountered: enthusiastic above all, interested in everything, attracted by every work of art, by every question, and by every problem; knowing everything, reading everything, understanding everything. He pours forth in a discussion on literature or in the defence of the interests of the Society of Dramatic Authors, or in the directions given to the scene painter or to the architect, a wealth of entrancing eloquence. He would have made a wonderful journalist, a unique debater. And how scrupulous he is! After the suspension of his drama, *Thermidor*, he resolved to transpose the play into a novel. He was to have called the book *La Terreur*, but will this work ever see the light of day? Sardou has it in the shape of memorandums and notes, and these already make a formidable mass.

“When will you compile the book, dear friend?”

“When I have all my notes: but it will be a world of trouble to revise all that dramatic epoch.”

One day Sardou would go to visit the dormitories of the *Lycée Louis le Grand* to refind there the traces of the dungeons of the terror; the next he would have the doors of what remained of Robespierre's house in the Rue St. Honore opened, and he would say to me, “You know the house is not demolished, as they say, and I found it, even to the room where Maximilian slept; I will show it to you. I've worked that all out from the plans—when shall we go and see it?”

He is now busied with the restitution of Athens, the Athens of the Renaissance, for a drama which he intends for Sarah Bernhardt. He knows the smallest turns, the stones of Acropolis, as well as he was acquainted with the subterranean passages of Byzantium, at the time when he wrote *Theodora*. When we were putting *Thermidor* on the stage it was a pleasure to see him carrying the properties one by one, like an ant in an ant-hill, now

with a plate bearing a revolutionary inscription, and again with a tri-colored flag which had figured of old in the tumultuous ranks of the sections. And placards of the period, and its newspapers, and busts of Lepelletier, Saint-Fargean, or of Marat. One day he was quite pleased when I said to him: "Do you know whom I will give you to play a small role? A relation of Danton's!"

"What! A relation of Danton's?"

"Yes, my dear friend, a little niece of the Ministre de la Justice; on the 10th of August Mademoiselle Danton will come. She is a model to the painter Cain when she is not dressmaking. It will be curious enough that a relation of Danton's should figure in a drama in which you represent Robespierre's fall."

"Yes, it would be curious. Where is she, this niece of Danton's?"

The next day I had the young girl brought to the theatre, and her face, though very agreeable, had something of the tragic cast of the tribune about it.

"Yes, yes," said Sardou, "she resembles him."

But it was much more striking when I put a powdered wig, such as Danton wore, on that young head. Then, as though called by a sort of sudden summons, we thought we saw the man of the revolution, he who bears in the sight of history the burden of a dismal period, but of whom Roger Collard said that he was magnanimous. The vision was complete and that child represented to us Danton in his youth: Danton at twenty years of age, Danton before the eruption of '89 and the thunder of '92.

It was this Mlle. Danton who figured at the breakfast where Labussière told Marshal and Mlle. Leconteux how he took away the file of papers from the Comité de Salut Public. Mlle. Danton found it quite natural to play for the first time on the stage of the Comédie Française, between M. Coquelin and Mlle. Bartet. She did not play there long. *Thermidor* was suppressed on the second representation, and Mlle. Danton retired into the shade. I do not know what became of her.

Victorien Sardou amused himself with those details which pleased his artistic nature. That practical spirit that left nothing to chance as he surveyed a rehearsal was at the same time a sensitive soul whose feelings were easily touched. I remember seeing him suddenly burst into tears when I told him that Émile Augier was prostrated by a mortal illness. "Oh, poor

Augier !” The day of the death of Victor Hugo I went, as I did daily, to the little house where the poet lay in agony. As I was about to enter I met Victorien Sardou, his eyes red. “It is all over,” he said to me, and he wept again for the great man who had been the admiration of his youth. But even in that emotion the dramatic author did not lose his accuracy.

“You saw him die ?” I asked him.

“No, but this is how I knew it was over. I was awaiting in the little room below that in which Victor Hugo was lying. I heard nothing above me, no movement, no sound. I said to myself : This silence is that of supreme expectation ! All at once above me I heard precipitous and rapid steps, the noise of chairs pushed about, giving one to imagine the excitement near the deathbed, the abrupt movements of grief. One cannot mistake such sounds, and I said to myself, ‘Victor Hugo is dead !’”

This was really the dramatic author imagining, divining, seeing the scene and picturing it by a sort of special magnetism. Any man who has not the sense of movement and of life might be a superior poet or a profound philosopher ; he could never express the truth on the theatre.

As Sardou was paying to M. Thiers, then President of the Republic, the customary visit of a candidate for the Academy, he astonished the historian of the Consulate and of Europe by speaking to him of the transformation of the modern theatre through the spirit which the new writers have infused into it by the correctness and wealth of details.

“I have stopped at the comedies of M. Scribe,” said M. Thiers.

“Monsieur le Président, have you stopped at the furniture of the time of Louis Philippe ?” replied Sardou.

“No,” and he looked around him.

“Have you stopped at the classic grouping of furniture round the chimney-piece, as in the time of Madame Récamier ? No ! There are arm-chairs in the middle of your room, some near the fire-place, some little stools, a sort of very pretty ordered disorder, which permits of conversation springing up in all the corners, giving an animation to the room which it had not when the older arrangement of furniture gave it a classic aspect. And what variety in the draperies ! That Japanese silk beside the Louis XV. table, that Chinese screen before the white Marie Antoinette chair, copied from the model of Trianon ! Diversity

is the aim of the modern furnisher. One does not want rigidity any more, but contrast; and our furniture, like our actions, is always significant. In that respect our comedians of to-day differ from those of the time of M. Scribe. M. Scribe put a sofa at each end of the stage and invariably a table in the centre. We put stands in all the corners, small furniture everywhere, and the table where it suits us."

M. Thiers was singularly interested with this little lecture given with all kinds of picturesque gestures.

He smiled and said to Victorien Sardou: "I understand now, my dear *confrère*, why Molière was so good an author. He had been an upholsterer."

Those words "My dear *confrère*" were in effect a promise that the statesman's vote would be given to Sardou. M. Thiers, in fact, voted for him.

In this attractive question of stage furniture it is strange enough that another theatrical manager, Alexandre Dumas ( *fils* ), belonged to a school totally opposed to that of Sardou. Alexandre Dumas, ( *fils* ) cares but little for details. In the laying out of the action of his pieces he only gives summary indications. First Act: *A Salon*; Third Act: *Same as first act*. Such were the instructions for most of his comedies. The stage-manager arranged the stage as picturesquely as he could from these vague directions.

Not that Alexandre Dumas does not indicate to his artists with perfect art the intonations which he desires, the exact expression that he wants. He knows very well what he wishes and he has it executed as he intends it should be. Nearly all dramatists, besides, *indicate* well, as they say in a theatre. Octave Feuillet read his works admirably. Edouard Pailleron is a reader, and I would say a very superior actor. He speaks with the utmost precision; he shows the exact gesture that must be made. I am absolutely of the opinion of Mr. Got, the oldest member of the staff of the *Comédie*, who voluntarily said that "An author who reads his work indifferently makes it better understood than an actor who reads it very well. He has a more correct idea of it and its movements." The comedian acts better but does not read so well.

But if, like Sardou, like Feuillet, Alexandre Dumas reads extremely well and indicates to the performers the very intonations

they must employ, he troubles himself less than Sardou about the setting, the frame of his work. When he was producing his works at the Théâtre du Gymnase, *Le Demi-Monde*, *Diane de Lys*, *La Femme de Claude*, he brought the manuscript of his work to the director, Mr. Montiguy, and allowed the play to be rehearsed without the slightest assistance from him. It was not till the end that he came, took a seat in front of the stage, and criticised the performance from the point of view of the audience.

Montiguy was an incomparable director, it is true, after having been (strange to say) an inferior dramatic author and a mediocre comedian. These singularities are not rare in artistic life. One might say that Montiguy, the author of that melodrama *La Découverte du Quinquina*, which vastly amused Jules Janin, revolutionized and modernized theatrical scenery. It was he (the circumstance seems to have no importance, but the reform dates from it)—it was he who first got actors to lay down their hats while playing. This appears insignificant, but it is characteristic. They had always before held their hats in their hands on the stage like the marquises of Molière or Regnard, who always put their plumed caps under their arms. Montiguy came and said, “Put down your hat,” and it made a regular revolution. It was the entrance of life and of truth into the realm of convention. And my friend Francisque Sarcey said: “Yes, the theatre is a convention, but a convention to which the greatest possible appearance of truth must be given to make the illusion successful.”

Alexandre Dumas thinks a little more than he used to do of the staging of his plays, but, like the classics, the complications or the luxury of splendid scenery are indifferent to him. “My pieces,” the author of *Demi-Monde* once said to me, “do not need to be well furnished.”

He troubles himself more about what those personages say and think than about what they do. In listening to Alexandre Dumas’ characters I cannot help thinking that I hear Dumas speaking himself. He loves glory, but he would have, above all, in the theatre, action, the influence which the theatre gives. It would never be he who would proclaim the theory of “Art for Art’s sake.” Dumas (*père*) could have taken *Scribitur ad narrandum* for his motto. Dumas (*fils*) would only say *Ad probandum*. I recollect the way in which he explained this

desire to me—the desire for battle, for the sake of battle, and not for victory and its triumphs.

Do you know what would be my dream? It would be to give, without signing it and in mid-summer, when Paris is empty, and is sojourning at the sea-shore or watering places, a piece which I should have written without even thinking of the public in the fullness of my idea—let it be paradoxical or irritating. The critic would not be influenced by the author's name, the reporters would give no account in advance of the coming work. It would be as when a case is tried with closed doors and M. X. or M. Y. would freely disclose his opinion. The question of receipts would not exist. The first night would not attract those eternal loungers who go to the theatre as they do to the races, and who finish by making a sport of art. If the piece were good, it would succeed all the same before this very limited public, and in any case I should have had the joy of setting forth truths in their entirety, without being obliged to mutilate them so that they might be acceptable to the crowd. An artist's dream, easy to realize in imagination, difficult in reality! They would soon guess the name of M. X. or of M. Y. The style of Dumas *filis* is not of a sort to remain long unrecognized. When he gave, in collaboration with Armand Durantin, or rather under the pseudonym of Armand Durantin, that lively and entrancing drama, *Héloïse Parquet*, produced at first without the name of any author appearing on the bill, Francisque Sarcey cried out on the first night, "The author of that piece is Dumas *filis* or the devil!"

And Dumas experienced a special sensation of pleasure at seeing his work, under another's name, make its way in the world. He has lately told this story in the preface to a new volume which he calls *Le Théâtre des Autres*. The habit which he has of putting a preface at the head of his works in re-editing them, has become a necessity for him. For that is a trait which he has in common with his father. He writes much and he writes quickly. If one was to publish his voluminous and interesting correspondence, one would arrive at a total of volumes which would eclipse that of the works of the author of *Trois Mousquetaires*, only Dumas (*filis*) has remarked that the public regard fertility, that virtue of strong pens, as a fault. Rapid in the execution of his works, by a rare and inherited gift, he is condemned to act

contrary to his own nature. And to write as much as pleases him without publishing more than is wanted of him, he writes prefaces which are models of discussion, and literary recollections and letters, the compilation of which will, by and by, form a collection of rare value.

When I think that they once took him for an author who wrote with difficulty, incapable of remodeling a scene once he had finished it. I have seen him in my office remake in half an hour the *denouement* of his comedy *Francillon*, after a rehearsal which he thought doubtful. "But it is excellent," I said to him; "there is nothing to change." "No, no, I know my trade," he answered; "that might be better;" and in a few moments it was better. He wrote *Danicheff* in a few days, *Héloïse Paranquet* nearly in a few hours. "Yes, in the carriage, with a pencil, my dear friend; my fingers were tired with it; those were feats of strength that I would not do again to-day."

He would do it again if it were necessary. I was looking at him the other day. He is robust, his head held high and firmly planted on an athletic body. I even think he is perfecting a play at Marly, near his neighbor, Sardou, which the public will be admitted to pass upon, but not that rare and anonymous summer public, of which he dreams for an ideal work, but the great public, *Le Herr Omnes*, which has always hailed him with applause since the *Dame aux Camélias*.

I have drawn here in my turn only rough and rapid sketches. But these notes, if they seem curious, can serve as *portraits en vied* of those I have known and, I can say, in speaking of the men of to-day, of those whom I have loved.

JULES CLARETIE.